31 March 1986

THE CIA IN TRANSITION

Casey Strengthens Role Under 'Reagan Doctrine'

By Patrick E. Tyler
and David B. Ottaway
Washington Post Staff Writers

When the Soviet Union shot down a Korean Airlines plane in September 1983, an angry President Reagan told CIA Director William J. Casey that the United States should send U.S.-made antiaircraft missiles to Afghanistan to help the rebels shoot down a few Soviet military aircraft in retaliation.

Casey was willing, but the plan was never approved, in part because of a reluctant Central Intelligence Agency bureaucracy, according to one source. Some top CIA officials argued that introducing U.S. weapons into that conflict would escalate it dangerously, end any possibility of "plausible denial" of U.S. involvement for Washington and alienate Pakistan, the main conduit for covert American aid to the rebels.

Now, with the decision to begin supplying U.S.-made Stinger antiaircraft missiles to the rebels in Angola and Afghanistan, the Reagan administration apparently has dispensed with such cautionary diplomacy. In so doing it has thrust the CIA into a far more public role as the lead agency in carrying out the United States' secret diplomacy.

This stepped-up commitment, under what some administration officials have called the "Reagan Doctrine," is dedicated to the president's vision of effectively supporting anticommunist "freedom fighters" in their struggle against Soviet-backed Marxist governments in the Third World.

An earlier article in this occasional series examined the evolution and debate over the "Reagan Doctrine." This one focuses on the role of the CIA in implementing that doctrine and the agency's remarkable growth during the tenure of Casey, the former Reagan campaign manager turned spymaster.

Casey's influence, both in rebuilding the CIA and as a trusted counselor to the president, has made him a critical and sometimes controversial player in the administration.

During his five years as CIA director, the intelligence budget has grown faster than the defense budget and the agency has rapidly rebuilt its covert-action capabilities with a goal of restoring the prestige of the CIA's Directorate of Operations. The "DO," as it is called, suffered a series of purges and investigations during the 1970s and its image was smeared by disclosures of past assassination plots, use of mind-altering drugs and spying on U.S. citizens.

Since that time, a new generation of senior managers has ascended to the top of the CIA, and they in general have been a more cautious breed, eager to avoid risky operations that would embarrass the agency if disclosed.

But Casey is not a prisoner of that past.

He is one of the anti-Soviet "activists" in the top echelon of an administration that has promoted stepped-up U.S. involvement in the struggle to "roll back" recent Soviet gains in the Third World. While supporting the CIA's more cautious career bureaucracy, Casey also has moved quietly—sometimes in his political channels—to prepare his agency for a more aggressive role in countering Soviet influence in the Third World.

to promote the administration's goals in Nicaragua and elsewhere in the Third World. More than once, according to sources, Casey has angrily rejected CIA analyses that did not mesh with the anti-Soviet pronouncements of White House policy-makers and speech writers.

One key senator has said that relations between Casey and the committees are at an all-time low. The penalty for Casey could come in the next two months as the committees prepare to make the largest cuts in the intelligence budget since the Carter administration.

Some officials see Casey's most formidable challenge in Reagan's second term as facing severe budget cuts mandated by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit-reduction act. This comes as the U.S. intelligence community is projecting multibillion-dollar outlays for a new generation of high-technology spy satellites that some officials say are badly needed to guard U.S. interests until the end of the century.

Some critics charge that Casey is 40 years out of touch with intelligence management and shows obsessive interest in mounting covert operations in the style of the World War II Office of Strategic Services, where he cut his teeth on clandestine warfare under Gen. William J. Donovan. His critics point out that these were tactics of a bygone era. The country was at war; the more covert operations the better.

Continued